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CHILDREN of WORKING MOTHERS

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CHILDREN of WORKING MOTHERS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

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CHILDREN of WORKING MOTHERS

"THE INCREASE in the gainful employment of women during the past few years has aroused new interest in the old questions connected with the social desirability of women's work and the social policy that should be pursued with regard to it." This statement is quoted, not from a comment about our present situation—although it sounds like many made today—but from a study published by the Children's Bureau in 1922.[1] The oldness of new problems is sometimes startling—but their age does not keep them from developing new aspects and renewed vitality.

The average person's conception of "the working mother" is like the New Yorker's map of the United States. The segment that means most to him occupies most of the territory. For some of us in the Social Security Administration, that segment is composed chiefly of low-income mothers, a large proportion of whom are parents without partners.

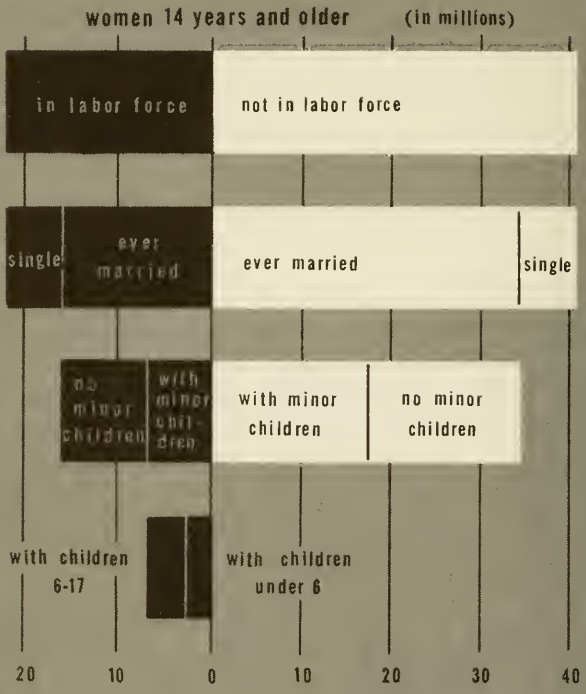
I have been instructed not to concentrate on this segment, but to consider all the working mothers in our Nation—a frighteningly large order. Before discussing what we know about effects on families and children of their mothers' gainful employment, I would like to suggest briefly how many women come under the classification "working mothers" and which mothers they are.

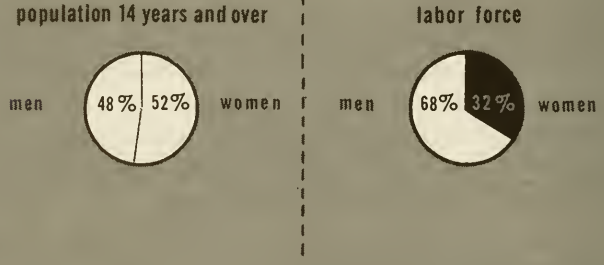
How many mothers work?

When people speak—as they often do—of the "quiet revolution" in women's employment over the past few decades, they mean

[1] Wright, 1922. (See list at the end of this pamphlet for complete bibliographical reference in alphabetical order to materials cited in footnotes.)

THE PLACE OF WORKING MOTHERS IN THE UNITED STATES POPULATION, APRIL 1958





source: Bureau of the Census.

chart 1

that women are working in greater numbers than ever before; that they constitute a larger proportion of the labor force than ever before; and that they are working for a larger part of their lives than ever before. In the 10 years, 1948 to 1958, the number of mothers in the labor force increased by 80 percent and the proportion by almost 50 percent.[2]

To give perspective to our map of working mothers, they should be placed in relation to the total civilian population. This is attempted in chart I. Of the 121 million people 14 or older in our civilian population in 1958, a little over half (52 percent) were women. The top bar in the chart represents all the women in the civilian population. Most of them are what the census reports call "ever married"—that is, they are or have been married. "Ever married" includes women who are widowed, divorced, or separated. Only the small strips at each end of the second bar are single women.

Of the total labor force, 32 percent were women. Of the 22 million women in the labor force, 16.6 million (76 percent) were or had been married. Almost half of these, 7.5 million had children under 18. That they are a modest proportion of our female population is brought out by a comparison of the first and last bars in chart I. Nevertheless, 7.5 million mothers are a great many mothers.

The majority of these mothers had children of school age only, but almost 2.9 million of them had children under 6. Since some had more than one very young child, the estimated number of preschool children with mothers in the labor force approaches 4 million.

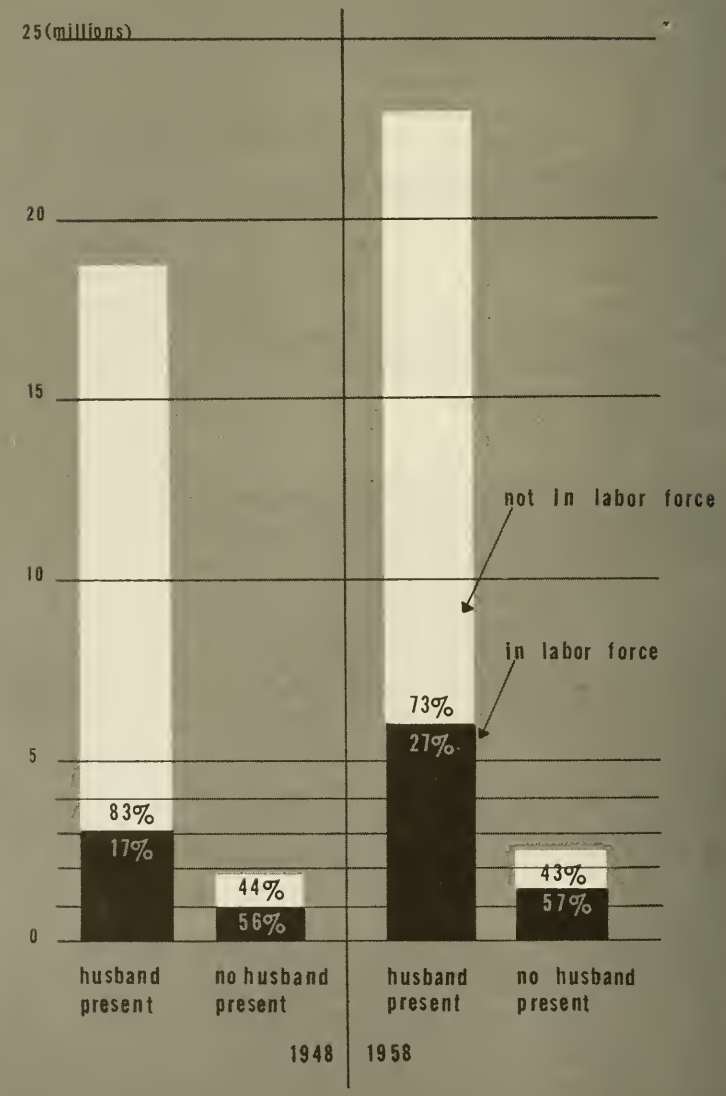
The women we shall be discussing are the 7.5 million working mothers, representing about a third of the female labor force, and almost a third of the mothers with children under 18. I shall brazenly refer to them as "working mothers" because everyone does—not because I assume that the homebody mothers do no work. By mothers, for present purposes, I mean mothers of children under 18. And when I say that a mother is in the labor force I mean that she works at a full-time or part-time job, either all the year round or for part of the year; or that she is unemployed but seeking work.

Which mothers work?

Figures are often, but by no means always, dull. Among the more fascinating statistics are those that tell which mothers work. They are interesting in themselves and also because they give clues

[2] Except where otherwise specified, national figures quoted are based chiefly on reports by the Bureau of the Census and the National Office of Vital Statistics, representing various points in the period 1957–58. Although precise numbers have changed somewhat, general proportions probably reflect the current situation.

LABOR FORCE STATUS OF WOMEN WITH MINOR CHILDREN BY PRESENCE OF HUSBAND, 1948 AND 1958



source: Bureau of the Census.

chart 2

to a more elusive question: why do mothers work? The clues are not adequate answers but in the absence of more satisfactory ones, they help.

Age of children. Which mothers work seems to be most strongly conditioned by the age of their children. Whatever their age, race, place of residence, financial status, or educational background, mothers of children under 6 are less likely to be working than other mothers.

The labor force includes 30 percent of all mothers, 20 percent of those with preschool children, and 41 percent of those who have children of school age.[3] Thus, if we look at overall totals, mothers with preschool children are less than half as likely to work as mothers with children no younger than 6 and no older than 17. In any category of mothers this tendency is evident—fewer mothers of very young children than of school-age children work. This difference persists, even though in the last 10 years the proportion of mothers of preschool children has risen more than the proportion of mothers of school-age children in the labor force.

Marital status. Another element in determining which mothers work is marital status. Whatever the age of the child, mothers living with their husbands are about half as likely to work as "other" mothers. However, in each marital category, a larger proportion of mothers with school-age children work than of mothers whose children are under 6.

Discussion of marital status calls for a further definition of terms, following the usage of the Bureau of the Census, on whose figures we rely. "Wives" means women married and living with their husbands. "Other" ever married women means those widowed, divorced, or otherwise separated from their husbands. The monthly population reports do not account for unmarried mothers. Presumably a good many of them describe themselves as divorced or separated from their husbands, and are recorded as "other" women.

A comparison between figures for 1948 and 1958 brings out a striking fact about which mothers work. (See chart II.) The proportion of "wives" who are working mothers has gone up about 10 percentage points. For "other" mothers, a large proportion of whom were already working, there is virtually no change. Yet the proportion of working mothers among them is still twice as high as for those with husband present. These relationships hold, regardless of the child's age, as shown in table I (p. 6).

[3] SSA, 1959.

Here is one obvious clue to why some mothers work—namely, the absence of a male breadwinner to support the family. And that reason was apparently as urgent 10 years ago as it is today. The figures suggest that the rise has occurred chiefly among those who—whatever pressures they were conscious of—had more choice about whether or not to work.

TABLE I

LABOR FORCE STATUS OF MARRIED WOMEN*

Presence of children and marital status	Married women in labor force			
	Number (000)		Percent of total	
	April 1948	March 1958	April 1948	March 1958
Children under 18 years				
All women ever married	**4, 163**	**7, 494**	**20. 2**	**29. 5**
Husband present	3, 151	6, 113	16. 7	26. 5
Other	1, 012	1, 381	56. 4	57. 3
Children under 6 years	1, 557	2, 847	12. 8	20. 1
Husband present	1, 222	2, 399	10. 7	18. 2
Other	335	448	45. 3	45. 1
Children 6–17 years only	2, 606	4, 647	30. 7	41. 1
Husband present	1, 929	3, 714	26. 0	37. 6
Other	677	933	64. 1	65. 8
No children under 18 years				
All women ever married	**7, 042**	**9, 142**	**30. 5**	**35. 8**
Husband present	4, 394	5, 713	28. 4	35. 4
Other	2, 648	3, 429	34. 6	36. 6
Total	**11, 205**	**16, 636**	**25. 6**	**32. 6**

*This table and a number of figures in the text are taken from *Facts About Families*, Division of Program Research, SSA, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, March 1959.

If we concentrate only on the part of chart II that refers to 1958, there is still a rather tricky relationship between numbers and proportions. About one-fourth (27 percent) of the working mothers who are "wives" were in the labor force in 1958, as compared with

over half (57 percent) of the working mothers not living with husbands. Yet the number of "wives" is more than four times as large as the number of "other" mothers in the labor force. In thinking about working mothers, then, it is well to remember that over four-fifths of them are "wives" and less than one-fifth are mothers in broken homes—even though the problems of the "other" mothers may loom larger in our awareness.

Income. The average income of women is lower than that of men. In 1957, women who worked full time the year round averaged not quite two-thirds of the average income for men who worked full time. The difference is much greater if part-time workers are included. This differential takes a special toll of women in broken homes. The average income of all families with a female head was little more than half that of those with a male head in 1957. Almost two-fifths of the families headed by women had incomes under $2,000.

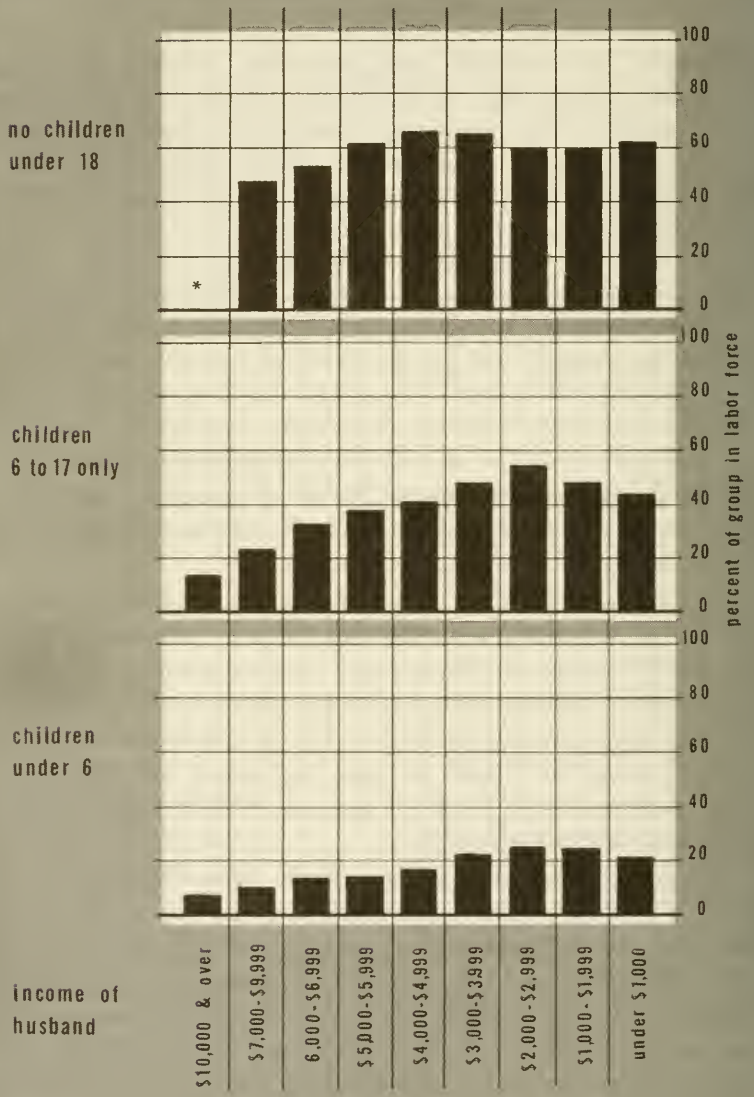
Among mothers living with their husbands, the size of the husband's income strongly affects the decision to work, although less strongly than the child's age. Chart III shows wives 20 to 44 years old, divided according to husband's income. For mothers with children at home, the rates of labor force participation drop steeply as the husband's income rises beyond $3,000—although for any income level the rate is higher when the child is of school age than when he is under 6.

Among wives 20 to 44 years old, whose husband's income was $10,000 or over in 1956, and who had children under 6, 7 percent were in the labor force in March 1957. Among mothers of preschool children whose husbands made $1,000–$3,000 a year, 25 percent were in the labor force. Among mothers of school-age children whose husbands had incomes of $10,000 or more, 14 percent were in the labor force, as compared with about 50 percent of those whose husbands were in the $1,000–$3,000 bracket.

When the husband's income drops below $2,000, this neat progression is broken, for reasons special to very low income groups, but here also the proportion of working wives is larger than in the top income brackets; and the proportion on the school-age side larger than on the preschool. These relationships are made more striking by contrast with labor force participation rates among wives who do not have children under 18. Among them there is only a moderate and irregular relation between labor force participation rates and husband's income.

Color. Nonwhite women—including mothers—are more likely than white women to work, and are also likely to receive lower pay.

LABOR FORCE PARTICIPATION RATES OF WIVES 20 TO 44 YEARS OLD BY PRESENCE OF CHILDREN AND INCOME OF HUSBAND, MARCH 1957



*base less than 150,000, not calculated.

source: Bureau of the Census.

chart 3

In 1957 the median income for all white female workers was $1,310 and for nonwhite female workers $757. The figures for those employed full time the year round are higher in both groups, but part-time or intermittent employment is more common among nonwhites.

In brief. Mothers of children under 18 are *less* likely to be in the labor force—

If the husband is present (27 percent) than if the mother is widowed, divorced, or separated (57 percent)

If the children are under 6 (20 percent) than if they are 6 or over (41 percent)

If the husband's income is $10,000 or more (7 to 14 percent, according to age of the child) than if it is under $3,000 (more than three times as high)

If they are white (15 percent for mothers of preschool children) than if they are nonwhite (28 percent for mothers of preschool children)

The chief increase in the proportions of mothers working has been among those living with their husbands, and among those above the lower income levels. That is, the increase has occurred chiefly among those who were not forced to work in order to meet the subsistence needs of their families.

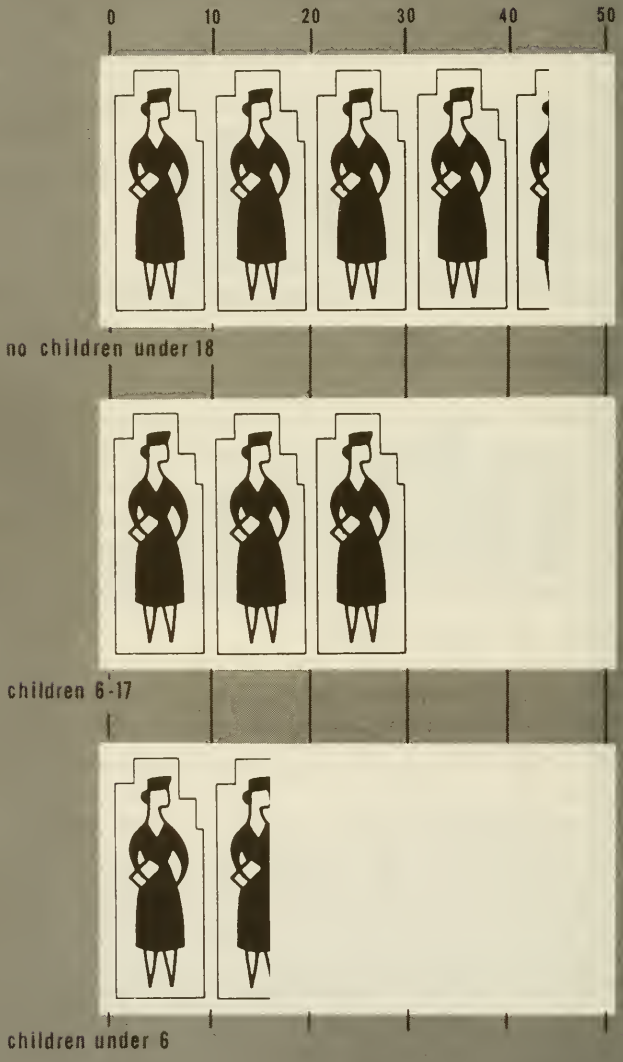
How much do they work?

Of the mothers who work, the majority work at full-time jobs in any one week, but many do not work all year round. Proportions vary sharply with the age of the children, mothers of very young children being far more likely to work part time or not all the year round. (See chart IV.) During 1956 (the latest year for which we have information) only 16 percent of the working wives with preschool children held full-time jobs during the entire year, as compared with 31 percent of those with school-age children, and 44 percent of those with no children under 18.[4]

For women living with their husbands, the extent of full-time or part-time work is also related to the husband's income, part-time work being more frequent in the very high- or very low-income brackets. During 1956, more than a third of all working wives whose husbands' incomes were $3,000–$7,000 worked at full-time jobs for 50 weeks or more, as compared with a little over one-fourth when the husband's income was under $2,000 or $10,000 and over.[4]

[4] Bureau of the Census, 1958.

PERCENT OF WORKING WIVES WHO WORKED FULL TIME* BY PRESENCE AND AGE OF CHILDREN, 1956



*35 or more hours per week, for 50 weeks or more.

source: Bureau of the Census.

chart 4

Why do mothers work?

The figures just reviewed give support to what most women say if asked directly: they work primarily in order to earn money. The unfailing correlation between available income, age of children, and a mother's decision whether or not to enter the labor force supports the assertion that the primary motive is moneymaking. That other motives often enter in goes without saying. Often there is one leading reason for working and a cluster of subsidiary ones, and one woman's primary motive may be another woman's afterthought. Aside from earnings, some reasons often mentioned are: a wish for present independence or future security, the loneliness or drudgery of undiluted homemaking, the low status of being "only a housewife," the satisfactions of the work itself, or the recognition to be won in a career. To say how often or in what degree these and other motives operate would be impossible on the basis of present evidence, largely composed of precoded question-and-answer interviews with highly variable samples, the observations of psychiatrists and other counselors, and the expert opinion of countless laymen. However, the convergence of such material, census figures, and a few depth studies, does establish moneymaking as the overall leading reason for the majority of working mothers.

To say this is, of course, merely to push the question back one notch to the query—why do they want to earn money? For a large proportion of working mothers the answer is simply that they must work in order to give their children adequate food, shelter, and clothing. Despite our rising standard of living, it has been estimated that in 1957 nearly a fourth of all families with children had incomes that were clearly inadequate, and if to these are added the families whose incomes are "uncomfortably low" the number rises to about one in three.[5]

Food, shelter, and clothing may be pressing needs even above the subsistence level. However, a considerable proportion of the more prosperous mothers also seem to feel an urgent need for increasing the family income. One of these exclaimed in desperation, "What choice do we have? Sure, my husband makes over $10,000 a year, but how can we meet medical expenses and send the children to college if I don't work?" To some mothers, not necessarily bent on keeping up with the Joneses, the education of their children seems as basic a necessity as food and shelter is for other mothers.

[5] White House Conference, 1960; Women's Bureau, 1951.

How many would work if they did not feel compelled to is an open question, since various studies give majority answers in both directions. So far, however, most girls and women affirm a preference for marriage over a career and behave accordingly, tending to select jobs in line with traditional female roles and those which seem to promise social contacts leading to ultimate marriage.[6] Despite current concern about confusion in sex typing, there are no convincing indications that women want to renounce the role of wife and mother. In a study of child-rearing patterns the authors state that, "counter to some rather widely held beliefs," the young mothers in their sample seemed ready and eager to exchange outside work for the care of small children. "Except for a very small number of women who were enthusiastically attached to their out-of-home jobs, the prospective advent of a child did not appear to bring about a significant amount of role conflict. Nearly all of the mothers had worked, at least before marriage, and they had experience from which to judge their own relative satisfactions in the two roles of outside worker and of mother. Rather surprisingly, there seemed to be a correspondence between a woman's enjoyment of both: those who were indifferent toward their jobs expressed little delight in the anticipation of motherhood either." [7]

Without trying to answer a question so shrouded in conflicting testimony, I have tried to indicate merely that the primary reason for working seems clear and that some fears about the motivations of working mothers seem not to apply to the majority of them. Beyond this, present data offer a confusing mass of material, rich in insights and stimulating hypotheses, but poor in solidly based conclusions.

While mothers work: who cares for the children, and where?

Mountains of words have been written about the need for adequate child care while mothers are working, the specifications for good care, and the gap between the facilities that should be and that are available. Numerous studies have been and are being made, attempting to estimate the demand for, the supply of and the quality of facilities for giving daytime care to children while their mothers work. Without attempting to discuss this many-faceted subject, I

[6] University of Michigan, 1956; Empey, 1958.
[7] Sears et al., 1957, pp. 62–63.

will summarize a few facts about the kind of arrangements made for children while their mothers work.

Survey of child-care arrangements. Until recently, although some local studies were available, we could only guess at the numbers of children in the country at large cared for at home, cared for away from home, or left to care for themselves during their mothers' working hours. In spring of 1958, however, the Children's Bureau contracted with the Bureau of the Census to obtain information on the child-care arrangements of one specific group of working mothers: those who worked full time and had children under 12 years of age. These women (2.9 million) represented about one-seventh of the mothers in the Nation and about 53 percent of the mothers in the labor force with children under 12. That is, about half of the mothers in the labor force with children of this age were working full time. The survey was conducted in June, but questions about child-care arrangements related to May, while school was still in session.[8]

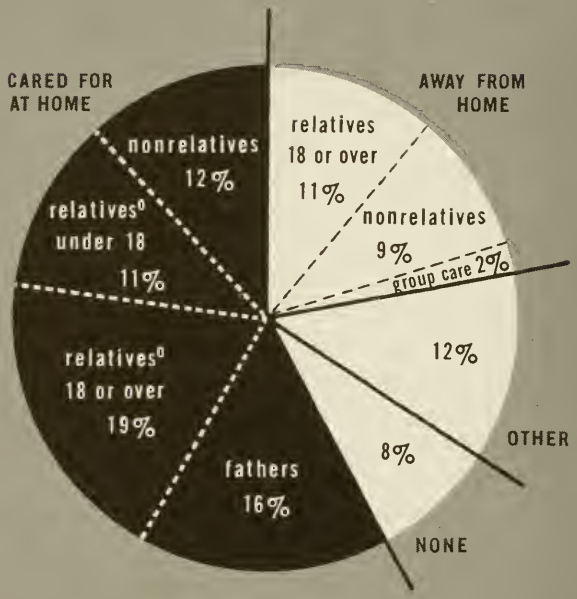
There were about 2 million children under 6 whose mothers were working full time, and 3 million between 6 and 12. More than four-fifths of the children lived with both mother and father, while 18 percent lived in homes broken by death, divorce, or absence of one parent. The proportion in "normal" homes is somewhat lower than the 87 percent of children under 18 in the total population who live with both parents, while the proportion in broken homes is somewhat higher than the 11 percent figure for the total population—a difference in line with the large proportion of "other" mothers in the labor force.

On the average, the number of children under 18 was the same (2.3) in these families as in all families with children. About one-third of the families had one child, another third had two children each, nearly a fifth had three children, and slightly more than a seventh had four or more children.

Care at home. Chart V shows the kinds of arrangements made to care for the children under 12 while their mothers worked. Well over half of them (58 percent) were cared for in their own homes, chiefly by fathers or other relatives. Approximately 16 percent were cared for by fathers whose working hours differed from the mothers', or who were unemployed, or not in the labor force. Almost twice as many (30 percent) were cared for at home by relatives other than the father. Many of the families had children over as well as under 12, and apparently these siblings were often the caretaking relatives—for about a third of them were under 18. About 12 percent of the

[8] Lajewski, 1959; Bureau of the Census, 1959; p. 6.

DAY CARE ARRANGEMENTS FOR CHILDREN UNDER 12 WHOSE MOTHERS WORK FULL TIME, MAY 1958



[0] other than fathers

source: Lajewski, Henry C., Child Care Arrangements of Full-Time Working Mothers, Children's Bureau Publication, No. 378–1959.

chart 5

children were cared for at home by nonrelatives, of whom about one in seven were neighbors.

Care away from home. Twenty-two percent of the children received care away from home—almost half of them by relatives, of whom virtually all were 18 or more. Care away from home by a nonrelative was arranged for about 9 percent, two-thirds of whom were cared for by neighbors.

Of the 5.1 million children under 12 whose mothers worked full time, 121,000 (4 percent of those under 6) were receiving group care—in day nurseries, day-care centers, settlement houses, nursery schools, and the like—while their mothers worked. This is a small proportion, but a great many children.

"Other arrangements." For about one-eighth of the children it was not possible to classify the kind of arrangements made, although for most of them some provision was reported.

Children "on their own." Many mothers do not take full-time jobs until their children reach school age, so that arrangements for their care are required only between the end of the schoolday and the mother's return from work. Some plan for supervision was reported for the majority of the school-age children. However, 400,000 were expected to take care of themselves—and the number is more likely to be an underestimate than an overestimate, since mothers would hardly claim *not* to have made arrangements if they really had. The no-arrangement group, as chart V shows, includes 8 percent of the whole—but most of them are over 6, and 20 percent of the children 10 and over are in it. These are the "latchkey children" of whom we hear so much, and for whom special efforts are being made through the school systems of some cities and through many organizations—efforts that so far barely scratch the surface.[9]

Aid to Dependent Children. A study made by the Bureau of Public Assistance shows that, in 1958, about one-sixth of the ADC mothers were employed—two-thirds part time and one-third full time. Of the ADC children under 12 whose mothers worked full time, one in nine had no daytime care arrangements; of those whose mothers worked part time, one in seven was expected to care for himself.[10] This compares with 1 in 13 of the nationwide sample of children under 12 whose mothers work full time. The difference may lie in the nature

[9] Rosner, 1957.
[10] SSA, 1958.

of the samples. If so, it may be another indication that low incomes are associated with less adequate arrangements for care.

For those who take a gloomy view of such findings, a few local studies will deepen the gloom. A report from Kentucky, for example, states that among ADC families in the State, "about 1,500 mothers work full time or part time to earn an average of $34 monthly"; and that while the mothers work, one-third of the children under 6 years of age are cared for by other young children or have no arrangement for their care; adding that this is true also for 44 percent of the children aged 6 to 12.[11]

A California study, completed in 1956, provided sobering information about the child-care practices fostered by the effort to encourage employment and self-maintenance of parents of needy children, and evaluated the effects of this policy on the Aid to Needy Children program. Forty-two mothers who were seasonal agricultural workers were interviewed. Their wages ranged from $7 to $10 a day and five of them paid for child care, fees ranging from $1 to $4 a day for the care of all the children in the family. Some of the women explained that they could not pay the rates asked. The study found that it was "usual, and apparently normal, that children are taken to the fields for purposes of supervision, left alone or in the care of older children and neighbors," sometimes with distressing results for the children. The investigators concluded, among other things, that "a paradox exists between actual child-care practices and requirements of the law." [12]

The extent to which some mothers sacrificed their convenience to the care of their children appears in a report of 100 Negro ADC mothers in Chicago, some of whom worked at night because they thought the children safer in bed than on the street. Many who worked during the day had regular telephone arrangements for checking on the children after school.[13] Yet in this study too, the worker inquired into the supervision of children "not too closely and sometimes not at all."

Effects on children and families

A working mother's children and family life are affected by her absence while she works, by the accommodations she makes in child rearing and homemaking to the fact of her absence (including arrangements for child care), by the effects on her—physical and psychological—of carrying two jobs, and by the fact that she is aug-

[11] Kentucky-BLS, 1959; p. 3.
[12] Kern County, 1956.
[13] Kasman, 1945.

menting the family income. To say that her working makes a difference, however, does not tell the nature, degree, or consequences of that difference.

It is appropriate, then, to raise the question: What do we know about the social and psychological effects on children and families of the mother's employment outside the home?

This question has often been asked as if any effects discovered are bound to be crucial and unfavorable. We are learning, however, to ask: Are they major or minor; are they favorable, unfavorable, mixed or neutral? We are also tending more and more to recognize that the effects will be different for different kinds of mothers, children, and families; and that "different kinds" may refer to age, income, individual temperament, social setting, and a number of other variables.

The research evidence available so far supports a number of generalizations. Most of them must be made tentatively, because the evidence suffers from two drawbacks: the complexity of the subject and the defects of the research.

The complexity of the subject is proverbial. Cause and effect are difficult to establish in any case—above all, when the variable in which we are interested (in this case, maternal employment) is one of many that could contribute to the kinds of results in which we are interested.[14]

Often it is easier to demonstrate what is *not* true than what is. Our evidence may indicate that the hypothesis or assumption under study is *not* confirmed and yet fail to show what other hypothesis is correct—especially when we attempt to assess specific elements of a whole too complex to be explored by one study.

These comments apply to most, if not all the research relating to effects on children and family of the mother's outside employment. To some extent the defects of available research are caused by the complexity of the subject, to some extent by lack of control groups, imprecise definitions, and above all failure to control such variables as socioeconomic status (affectionately called SES for short).

Our research evidence offers a further problem—skepticism about some of the specific measures used. The best studies of infants and very small children are based on careful and consistent observation and interviewing. Some studies of older children base their findings on paper-and-pencil questionnaires, which leave much to be desired. Many of them have been carefully tested for reliability, however, and what is more important their results are consistent with

[14] Maccoby, 1958.

findings derived from measures which may command more confidence.

The nature of our data naturally conditions the nature of the generalizations that can be made from them. We may not be able to say that certain effects have been proved present or absent. We can say, however, that evidence so far fails to support or definitely challenges a number of assumptions, leaving the burden of proof still to be shouldered. Despite their shortcomings, then, if the findings of available studies and of systematic observation are reviewed with due caution and skepticism there is sufficient basis to reach some conclusions, however tentative, about what we do and do not know in this area.

To speak separately of effects on children and on family is, of course, artificial. However, expediency suggests making a division between evidence concerning the development and adjustment of the individual child and evidence concerning family structure and functioning. In accordance with approved usage, we will take the children first, starting with the youngest.

Effects on preschool children (psychological and emotional)

To begin with, it is usually assumed—and this assumption is not challenged by any studies we have found—that a loving mother who wants to take care of her own child and is reasonably well equipped to do so is likely to be the best caretaker, especially in the early years. Moreover, for such a mother to be with her children when they are very young is a profound gratification and to be separated from them a profound deprivation. We have seen, in fact, that most mothers of young children are not in the labor force. Our figures make it clear that *most* mothers of preschool children do not work unless they feel compelled to do so. However, it is no secret that some mothers are not loving, and some who are do not want to devote themselves exclusively to infant or child care. There is a strong and growing conviction among psychiatrists and social workers that some women are better mothers if their mothering activities are part time rather than full time; and that their children may suffer adverse effects if the mother is constrained *not* to work. This belief merits research investigation. We also know all too well that some mothers are forced by circumstances to entrust their children to the care of others for the working hours of the day; and that, whether by preference or by necessity, a growing proportion of mothers of young children are in the labor force. What, then, of their children?

Our evidence suggests:

That the effects of being apart from the mother during work

hours are not to be equated with the effects of losing her entirely.

That the effects of care by warm and friendly adults, in addition to their own mothers, are probably not as damaging to most infants and very young children as is often assumed—*if* the care provided for the children is adapted to their needs. To spell out the requirements for meeting their needs is beyond the scope of this paper. It is generally agreed, for example, that the needs of very young children cannot be met adequately if one adult is responsible for more than a small number of children.

There is among many who work with children a strong conviction that it is damaging to an infant or a very young child to have more than one "mother figure" at a time, or in sequence. This principle has been challenged by some anthropologists who point to the frequency of "assistant mothers" in primitive societies, and the absence of evidence that children, or the adults they become, are harmed by it. Mothers often leave children to be cared for by other adults or older children, while they work in the fields. Since the custom is universal in the groups that practice it, say the anthropologists, one would have to conclude either that the society itself is "sick" or that the children survive the mother's daily absence without perceptible damage.

According to Margaret Mead, "anthropological evidence gives no support at present to the value of such an accentuation of the tie between mother and child (as occurs in the United States). On the contrary, crosscultural studies suggest that adjustment is most facilitated if the child is cared for by many warm friendly people." [15]

Who the people are and how the child is cared for are obviously crucial considerations. The one point to be made here is that the belief in a child's need for care *only* by his own mother or by one constant surrogate mother—like so many other beliefs—appears to be a cultural rather than a universal human belief.

Even in occidental culture, the insistence on this need is recent and far from universal. The "nannie" or governess raised a great many children in Europe and the United States. A good many solid American citizens have also been the children of working mothers. Possibly the constant care of a loving mother would have been better for these and possibly some were maladjusted who otherwise might not have been. However, this kind of experience raises question about the prevailing harmfulness of having young children cared for part of the time by others in addition to the mother.

A salient concern among child-care workers has been lest early separation of the child from his mother should inflict irreversible damage on his general development and especially on his capacity for

[15] Mead, 1954.

interpersonal relations. To some extent this concern has been stimulated by oversimplification of the conclusions Bowlby drew from his compilation of studies relating to maternal deprivation.[16] Subsequent studies have shown the damage caused by maternal deprivation to be less frequent, and less permanent when it occurred, than many had believed.[17] More important for our purposes, however, our evidence offers no basis for believing that the sweeping and often traumatic maternal deprivation to which he gave major attention is equivalent to separation during the working hours of the day and return to the parents at night.

A number of studies indicate that separation from the mother during part of the day is not *in itself* necessarily damaging to the child.[18] That the impact will be different for different children goes without saying; and that it will be conditioned by the kind of care the child receives during this period. According to the Children's Bureau study, 121,000 preschool children whose mothers worked full time were given group care during her work hours (as of 1958). What we do not know is the *quality* of that care, and how much—if at all—it differs for children in different economic groups. We also lack any overall picture of the quality of care given by relatives, neighbors, and others. We do know something about those daytime foster homes that are licensed—but many day-care arrangements are made informally and individually without agency assistance. As I have already explained, I cannot even begin to discuss this large question of daytime care. I must comment, however, that its quality is crucial and we know too little about it.

Assuming that the substitute care is adequate—and this is a large assumption—the impact on the child of his mother's working is likely to be influenced by the attitudes and practices of the community in which he lives, especially as he grows older. If it is usual for mothers to go to work, he is probably more likely to accept the daily absence as a fact of life than if his mother is the exception among those he knows. The impact is also likely to be influenced, as he grows older, by his perception of her reasons for working, by her own attitude and that of the father toward her working, and by her devices for counteracting the sense of separation. These in turn depend on a number of other factors, among which the personality of the mother is paramount.

No studies have been found directly relating to the effects of

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[16] Bowlby, 1952.

[17] Bowlby et al., 1956.

[18] A few relevant studies are: Rabin, 1958; Glass, 1949; Simonson, 1947; Heinicke, 1956. See also Rheingold and Bayley, 1959; Maccoby, 1958; Lewis, 1954.

care of very young children at home or in another family while the mother works. However, we do have a large body of evidence about the kind of care that is helpful or harmful to any child, whether his mother works or not. Wherever the child is cared for, he needs warm and consistent supervision that is in keeping with the developmental needs of his age.

It is unfortunately true that in our society, with its increasing tendency to small family units, including parents and children but not grandparents or other relatives, the middle income mother may find it easier than the low income mother to arrange for adequate substitute care. True, extended households are more common among the low income groups than in the middle or upper income levels. Nevertheless, the glib statement that supervision is crucial (a statement to which I shall return later) may be as useless to some low-income working mothers as a physician's advice to go south for a 6-month rest.

A number of studies have attempted to investigate the extent to which the fact of the mother's working outside the home is related to various aspects of child adjustment and behavior.

One of these studies, which deals with preschool children, is an investigation into the effect of maternal employment on the child's dependency. As the authors explain, "it seemed reasonable to believe that if maternal employment is indeed a significant factor in the constellation of psychological and social factors which provide a background for the mother-child relation and thus for personality development in the young child, its implications will be greatest for the child's development with respect to dependence and independence. Development in this respect may be presumed to relate to the consistency of the care the child receives, the frequency of his contacts with the caretaker, the number of different people who assume caretaking responsibility for him, the diversity of their child-rearing techniques and the diversity of their attitudes toward the child. All of these conditions may be quite different for the child of a working mother than for the child of a full-time homemaker." [19]

Using a carefully conceived and executed matched-pairs design, they failed to find significant differences between the children of working and nonworking mothers with respect to behavior related to dependence and independence. Their conclusion from their data is that "maternal employment per se is not the overwhelmingly influential factor in children's lives that some have thought it to be." They did, however, find hints that the implications of maternal employment may differ for the two sexes, and they suggest the need for further

[19] Siegel et al., 1959; p. 534.

research concerning maternal employment and the process by which children become familiar with and grow into their own sex roles.

Effects on school-age children

The finding of Siegel and her colleagues is in line with the growing evidence that identification processes are different in the two sexes.[20] Hand also found evidence that the mother's working might affect boys and girls differently. Although he discovered no significant overall relationship between the adjustment of children of working and nonworking mothers, he found the percentage of working mothers slightly larger for maladjusted boys than for the well-adjusted boys in a group of elementary school children. The reverse was true for the girls, although neither difference was statistically significant.[21]

Two other studies have failed to find evidence that children of working mothers were less well adjusted generally than children of nonworking mothers.[22] A third shows less favorable parent-child relations among the daughters of working than of nonworking mothers.[23] However, the groups were not matched by socioeconomic status and may reflect this difference rather than the effect of the mother's working. The working mothers were probably concentrated in the low income families; and the kinds of problems indicated by the girls are those that several investigators have found to be more characteristic of working-class than of middle-class families.[24]

With respect to school performance, the studies reviewed showed no difference between children of working and nonworking mothers, with one exception. Ivan Nye found that adolescent children of working mothers did better than the children of nonworking mothers. Here again, that obstreperous variable, socioeconomic status, raises doubt about the results. In this sample (2,350 high school students, in 3 communities) the working mothers were, on the whole, better educated than the others, and it is well established that the children of well-educated parents tend to do better at school than the children of parents with less education.[25]

The most explosive topic discussed in relation to maternal employment is juvenile delinquency. A typical comment is that of an Ohio judge who announced that among juvenile delinquents, both

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[20] Hartley, 1959–60.
[21] Hand, 1957.
[22] Blood and Hamblin, 1958; Nye, 1958.
[23] Essig and Morgan, 1946.
[24] Bronfenbrenner, 1958; Sears et al., 1957; Kohn, 1959.
[25] Nye, 1957; 1958.

parents are employed twice as often as in the general population, and urged that families restrict themselves to the father's income and keep the children at home. This statement, like many others, was based on cases coming before the court, with no control group to determine in what way the backgrounds of delinquent children resemble or differ from those of nondelinquents. Most adjudged delinquents come from relatively low socioeconomic groups, where—as we have seen—the proportion of working mothers is relatively high.

A much-publicized article by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck is based on data taken from a study conducted in the 1940's [26] and reanalyzed with an eye to the working mother. The Gluecks do not say that the mother's working causes delinquency. They found, in fact, that the children of regularly employed mothers were no more likely to be delinquent than the children of nonworking mothers, but that the children of sporadically employed mothers were more likely to be delinquent. Their early study had already shown that the mothers who worked sporadically tended to be women with unfortunate family histories, tendencies to delinquent behavior, and husbands who were emotionally disturbed and had poor work habits. In other words, the delinquency of the boys is associated with the character and habits of the mothers rather than with their work status.

Maccoby has reanalyzed the reanalysis of the Gluecks' data, bringing out the real moral of their tale—namely, that the chief variable differentiating between delinquency or nondelinquency in the child appears to be the quality of supervision given to him by his mother. "If the mother remains at home but does not keep track of where her child is and what he is doing, he is far more likely to become a delinquent (within this highly selected sample) than if he is closely watched. Furthermore, if a mother who works does arrange adequate care for the child in her absence, he is not more likely to be delinquent (indeed possibly less so!) than the adequately supervised child of a mother who does not work." [27]

She goes on to point out another important lesson to be learned from the reordered data; among the working mothers, a majority did not in fact arrange adequate supervision for their children in their absence. "Thus we are reminded of the problem of obtaining good substitute care for the children of working mothers in these days of isolated nuclear families containing few grandmothers, maiden aunts, or older daughters who will assume a responsible role in child care."

Nye also found that the association between maternal employment and juvenile delinquency largely evaporated when key variables were held constant. However, although in his study the differences

[26] Glueck, 1950; 1957.

[27] Maccoby, 1958.

between children of working and nonworking mothers became statistically nonsignificant, a difference did remain, showing more delinquent behavior in families of employed mothers. Since the differences were all in the same direction, Nye concluded that there was in fact some connection between maternal employment and delinquency, but that it was slight and far less important than other factors. He too ascribed the difference to "less effective direct controls" by the working mother over her children.

Two studies, on the other hand, report less delinquency among the children of working than of nonworking mothers. Bandura and Walters found, in a group of middle-class boys, more working mothers among the nondelinquent than among the delinquent ones—although the numbers were too small for statistical significance.[28] And a Detroit study found, among school-age children who had case records with the police department, only one out of four whose mother worked, although among all children of this age one out of three had a working mother.[29]

Myrdal and Klein report that a study carried out in Britain has shown the rate of delinquency among children whose mothers go out to work is no higher than among those whose mothers stay at home, other conditions being equal.[30]

These and other studies seem to indicate that, when relevant variables are controlled, there is no significant association between juvenile delinquency and maternal employment per se. Despite its limitations, there is striking consistency in the evidence concerning the direct effects on children of their mothers' employment outside the home. None of the studies reviewed has shown that, when relevant factors such as socioeconomic status are controlled, maladjustment and developmental or behavior problems are increased by the mother's working. The evidence is, of course, limited to the measures used by the various studies. Moreover, to demonstrate absence of perceptible ill effects is not to demonstrate the presence of beneficent effects. Current theories of child development point to the advantage—other things being equal—of having the mother in the home at least during the child's preschool years, for his sake and also for the mother's. The factfinding report of the Midcentury White House Conference on Children and Youth comments: "It may well be questioned whether most mothers can, without undue strain, carry a full-time job and still give responsive and attentive care to the physical and emotional needs of small children." [31]

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[28] Cited by Maccoby, 1958; p. 154.

[29] Cited in Pope, 1955.

[30] Myrdal and Klein, 1956; p. 134.

[31] White House Conference, 1950.

But other things are often not equal. And our evidence is highly relevant in situations where it is expedient, advisable, or necessary for the mother to work. The situation is, of course, defined not only by external circumstances and the mother's individual makeup but also by the child's individual needs and susceptibilities. Our studies deal with prevailing norms in groups of children and not with the individual children who may have special need to be close to or removed from their mothers.

The other sweeping generalization consistent with the studies reviewed concerns the great importance of the arrangements made for children while their mothers work. This emerged specifically in relation to two studies dealing with juvenile delinquency and is also supported by the large body of research relating to child development regardless of whether the mother works.

Effects on family life

Some of the evidence concerning the effects of the mother's outside employment on the family also bears directly on the child's development and adjustment, while some is more indirect in its bearing.

That so many mothers attempt the dual job of homemaking and wage earning is due to changes which have occurred during relatively recent years: the development of means for making housekeeping easier and less time consuming, earlier marriage, and longer life expectancy. Numerous youth surveys show that most girls today expect to work before marriage and perhaps until the first child is born. And statistics show an increasing tendency for women to return to the labor force either when the children enter school or when the last one leaves home.

The increased life expectancy, along with technological changes that reduce the time required for housekeeping, has resulted in a typical life cycle that contrasts dramatically with that of the average woman of years gone by. In the 1890's, according to the figures of the National Manpower Council,[32] a woman could expect to marry at about 22, bear her last child at about 32, have the last child leave home when the mother was about 55, and die at about 68. Today, the average girl marries at about 20, has her last baby before she is 30, and sees him enter school before she is 35.[33] He is likely to leave home before she is 50. After this she can look forward to an increased span of active life, since the average life expectancy of women has lengthened by about 10 years.

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[32] National Manpower Council, 1957.

[33] SSA, 1959.

As for the dual job itself, it merits far more comment than can be given here. Our life today seems to require more of many adults than a human being should be expected to accomplish. Yet, despite the incidence of heart attacks and ulcers—more frequent among men than among women—a surprising number seem to manage. One road to feasibility for the two-job woman has been the greater sharing of homemaking responsibilities between husband and wife. A man is no longer considered a sissy if he helps with such domestic tasks as taking clothes to be machine washed, shopping, dishwashing, baby tending, etc. The change appears to be much more marked in the middle than in the lower class—perhaps because this is the typical course of change, perhaps because the working mother is more of an innovation on the higher income level than on the lower. Nevertheless, the sharing of household duties has increased also in middle-class families where the mother does not work.

Some misgivings have been expressed lest the change in husband-wife roles prove harmful for the sex identification of the children. More often, however, students of family life dwell on the positive aspects of the shift: the view of marriage as a partnership in which both members share responsibility for homemaking, child rearing and income earning. Part of this plus, under favorable circumstances, goes to the children in the form of a more responsible and functional role in the household, a more appealing view of marriage as a dynamic partnership and—for the girls—a stimulating vista of "the many lives of modern woman." [34]

A great deal needs to be learned, however, about the sex-role image imparted to children in this day of more and more working mothers. Two studies already mentioned have suggested that the impact of the mother's outside employment may be different for girls and for boys. A number of studies have considered the implications of decreasing sex role differentiation, and at this point the evidence supports only the statement that we need to know more. One suspects, however, that here again the crucial factors will be found to lie in the family climate, the quality of the marriage, and the personal makeup of the parents, rather than in the precise content of the evolving parental roles. Moreover, although there has been some convergence in specific activities, the father (when he is present) is still typically viewed as the primary breadwinner and the mother as the primary homemaker. As we have seen, the father *is* present in the majority of homes where the mother works.

There has been a good deal of concern also about the effect of maternal employment on the marital relations of the parents, which

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[34] Gruenberg and Krech, 1952.

in turn affects the child's growth and development. Here again the evidence suggests that the woman's employment in itself is not a determining factor. One of our best known specialists in research on the family is quoted as saying, "Consensus of the research to date is that gainful employment of the wife is not a significant factor either in marriage success or marriage failure. It is a peg on which conflict can be hung, a socially approved area in which to disagree." [35]

On the other hand, a Detroit study found that 25 percent of the respondents of both sexes felt that the wife's participation in the labor force "disrupts interpersonal relations" in the family and 40 percent said that it "disrupts family life."[36]

It seems obvious that the amount of disruption would be conditioned by attitudes of the family and the working mother toward her employment. A study not yet released shows that husbands of working women are more likely to accept or actively to favor their employment than husbands of nonworking wives. A panel conducted by the YWCA showed analogous attitudes. The daughters of working mothers tended to approve the mother's outside employment, and to feel that they themselves gained by their increased responsibility in the home. The daughters of nonworking mothers held the opposite view—and were accused by the other girls of wanting their mothers to stay at home for purely selfish reasons.[37] Both studies suggest the ability of people to adjust to existing conditions—although undoubtedly the preference of husband and children affects the decision of many women to work or not to work.

Several investigators have tried to discover the kind of shifts that occur in the family power structure when the wife works, testing the hypothesis that the wife who earns money will carry more weight in decision making than the homebody wife. One of them, studying a sample of Irish Roman-Catholic families, concluded that his findings did show this to be the case.[38] Two others, using broader samples, came to the opposite conclusion: that the wife's influence in family decisions was not significantly affected by her earning power, but rested on other and more basic factors. One of them found, however, that the sharing of decisions and tasks was greater in families where the wife worked.[39] This is merely a confirmation of familiar observations and assumptions, but since so many assumptions are not confirmed it is worth mentioning one that is. The difference in findings may relate

[35] Applebaum, 1952; p. 13.

[36] University of Michigan, 1957.

[37] Working mothers, 1958.

[38] Heer, 1958.

[39] Blood and Hamblin, 1958; Hoffman, 1960.

to the rather specialized sample of the dissenting study, in which the authoritarian male-dominated household is traditional.

A primary reason for accepting the mother's employment, both by husbands and by children, is the simple fact that it augments the family income. Questions have been raised about how much a working mother can contribute after the costs of her employment have been deducted from her earnings. The questions are valid, especially for mothers who work at ill-paid employment, and most especially if the costs of adequate child care are high. There is no doubt, however, that in many two-parent homes the family income is substantially raised when the wife works. Census figures, as well as other studies and reports, bear out Feldman's statement that the wife's earnings "have materially accelerated both the steady rise in average family income and the steady rise in the number of families in the middle income group." [40]

The mother's attitude toward her own working both reflects and conditions the attitudes of her husband and children. It has often been remarked that women today are likely to feel guilty if they do work and to feel guilty (as well as faintly inferior) if they do not. Hoffman has attempted to explore the extent of the working mother's guilt feelings and their apparent effect on her child-rearing practices. She found that mothers who liked their jobs were more apt to feel guilty than those who did not; and that those who felt guilty were less likely to assign household responsibilities to their children than those who did not, and more likely to be affectionate and indulgent. However, whether the mother liked her job or not was strongly related to the kind of job it was; and the kind of job it was reflected her socioeconomic status. Pending publication of the complete report, a question remains to what extent the mother's demands on her child reflected her socioeconomic status rather than her degree of guilt.[41]

The guilt-free mothers in this study were the mothers with low status jobs. Another investigation, however, reports that lower class mothers were more anxious than upper class mothers about the effects of their working on their children.[42] The apparent conflict in evidence cannot be talked away. One is tempted to speculate, however, whether the greater anxiety of the lower class mothers had to do with their greater difficulty in arranging for adequate child care during their absence.

It is unfortunate that we have so little systematic evidence about

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[40] Feldman, 1958; p. 107; Blaisdell, 1958; U.S. News & World Report, 1958; Holmes, 1958.

[41] Hoffman, 1959.

[42] Heer, 1958.

the mothers' own view of their employment and its consequences. We do, of course, have a great deal of unsystematic evidence which suggests—as observed before—that a great many mothers feel guilty, whether they work or not. And we have the disquieting assurance from psychiatrists and family counselors that if a mother feels guilty, anxious, or uncertain about what she is doing, there are likely to be unfortunate repercussions on the child. Perhaps the greatest boon that could be given to working mothers and their children in this phase of our evolution would be freedom from anxiety and guilt. Apparently nonworking mothers need it just as much, but they are not the present topic of discussion.

We have been talking mainly about two-parent families, because these are in the majority and are the ones most frequently involved in family research concerning maternal employment. The problems of adjusting to the mother's absence from the home are likely to be increased if there is no spouse to share responsibilities; and the responsibility carried by school-age children is more likely to become too great, unless the mother has adequate income or adequate ingenuity and stamina to prevent this.

There is sometimes an unfortunate impulse to exclude one-parent families from discussions of healthy family life. It would be unfortunate and unnecessary, however, to write off more than 2 million mothers and their children as being shut out from a healthy family life. Actually, some broken families do a good deal better than some unbroken ones in achieving healthy family life and producing well-adjusted children. Two studies, for example, have shown the emotional adjustment of children from well-functioning one-parent homes to be superior to that of children from unbroken and unhappy homes—a finding in keeping with many reports of psychiatrists and counselors.[43]

Certainly one would wish for every child a happy home with two parents in it. Since the wish is obviously vain, it is comforting to be assured by systematic investigation and professional opinion, as well as by our own observations, that there can be family health in one-parent homes.

Any thinking we do about maternal employment must take account of the rate at which change is occurring, and this is especially true in connection with effects on the family. The "quiet revolution" in women's work habits, like any revolution, involves many changes—some welcome and some unwelcome—and itself occurs in a context of change. Some changes which ultimately appear desirable may seem undesirable while we are adjusting to them. Quite aside from the effects of maternal employment, the family appears to be undergoing

[43] Landis, 1955; Nye, 1957.

major changes today. Some of them relate to the shift of functions from the immediate family to the peer group, the school, and other organizations outside the home. In considering such changes we can take comfort both in the infinite varieties of family function that have proved adequate for other societies and in the basic flexibility of the family in our own.

In a book based on the materials produced for the Midcentury White House Conference, the authors remark, "All the evidence points to the infinite capacity of the family to change—to change its composition, to redefine the way it shares the care of children with other social institutions—and yet to retain its overall responsibility for them." [44] Still on the subject of change, Myrdal and Klein point out: "To combine a career with a family may be difficult at present; but it is already less so than it was 30 years ago, and it is likely to become easier as time goes on and technical efficiency increases, in particular if we set our minds to solving the problem." [45]

The review of evidence concerning the family yields less consistent results than the evidence concerning the direct effects on children of their mothers' outside employment. Yet with two exceptions, both based on slight samples, the findings reported seem to say that the quality of the family life influences the effects of a mother's outside employment more than her employment influences the quality of the family life. There are indications that the activities and responsibilities of mother and father overlap more in families where the wife works, but not that this in itself is unfavorable to family life. On the contrary, a number of signs suggest the opposite.

General comment

All in all, the research evidence available so far suggests that the mother's working is only one of many factors impinging on children, and—despite individual variations—that on the whole it is a secondary rather than a primary factor, so far as child development and adjustment are concerned. The primary factors, it would seem, have to do with family climate and functioning, the personality and temperament of the parents, the kind of care and training the child receives—whether the mother works or not. These may, of course, be affected by her working. But the impact of her employment seems to be affected by these primary factors more than they are by the fact of her working. This conclusion has surprised a number of investigators who reached it independently, and the last word has not yet been said (it never is). Yet if one thinks of problems found in homes where

[44] Witmer and Kotinsky, 1952; p. 209.

[45] Myrdal and Klein, 1956; p. 123.

mothers do *not* work, the surprise may dwindle. Words like Momism, overprotection, inadequate supervision, rejection, neglect, are not specific to families of working mothers.

A corollary generalization is that the primary factors strongly affect the kind of arrangements made for child care and for maintaining the well-being of family and homes if the mother does work; and that these arrangements in turn can be crucial. The evidence also hints that middle-income mothers are more likely than low-income mothers to achieve adequate supervision of children while the mother works—whether because they possess the means to do so, because they have been made more aware that it is important, or for both reasons.

Research needs. It is customary for a review of evidence to dwell at length on what questions most need investigating. I am not going to do this, partly because so little has been done that the needs are staggering. I would like only to point out a need for making certain distinctions that have not usually been made in previous research. Our census figures, our theories of child development, and our empirical observation tell us that there are significant differences in the amount of work that working mothers do and the kind of arrangements they make for their children. None of the studies reviewed investigated effects on children in relation to whether their mothers worked full or part time; or in relation to the *quality* (as distinguished from the type) of care their children received. Where comparisons were made, it was chiefly between children whose mothers worked and other children. In a number of studies, the sample was drawn to include only mothers who worked full time. It seems reasonable to assume that part-time work poses problems very different from full-time work, especially for the mother of school-age children. However, so far that assumption has not been tested to see whether the difference is perceptible in the children and what kind of difference it is. Nor have we found comparisons of children cared for in centers and those supervised by individuals of varying age, skill, and experience while their mothers work.

Helping working mothers to meet the needs of children and families

Apparently the working mother in all her infinite variations is here to stay at least during the foreseeable future. And apparently the effects on her family are determined less by the fact of her working than by the effectiveness of the arrangements set up to compensate for it. What, then, can be done, and by whom, to foster the best possible adjustments?

The best possible adjustments will demand efforts by the work-

ing mother herself, by her family, by her employer, and by the community.

Adjustments by the working mother. As for the working mother, no one denies that the demands of her dual job are strenuous, expecially if her children are below school age. Gruenberg and Krech remark that "if a woman is to be a good wife and mother and continue at the same time with her outside work, she probably needs more than an average combination of brains, physical stamina, money, good luck, and willingness to work." [46] The kind of efforts required of her and her family have already been implied, and to do them justice would require a separate treatise. A word should be said, however, about what employers can do.

By the employer. A major help would be more part-time work and in fact a trend toward it is evident. This trend needs to be increased and accompanied by greater flexibility in arranging just which hours a mother should work. The amount of flexibility may be limited by the type of work. However, probably more is feasible than has often been attempted. One factory owner, for example, offered mothers a choice of any four or more consecutive hours during the day or night, provided they were the same hours every day. More is being done to offer part-time employment to social workers, teachers, and nurses. Recommendations have been urged for special time off for white collar and blue collar workers to shop, or to telephone their children. Just how prevalent such employer concessions are is difficult to determine. Neither the Department of Labor nor the labor unions seem to have made any systematic survey. There is ample evidence, however, that part-time jobs are increasing.[47]

How far employers are willing to go in helping the mother make successful adjustments may depend—as one of them put it very simply—on "how hungry the market is." This is not the only deciding factor, however. In addition to pressure from jobholders and those interested in their welfare, a number of sources report an unexpected bonus to employers. They find that when women work fewer hours per day (or sometimes fewer days per week), their energy, productivity and accuracy increase and absences from work decrease. It seems, therefore, that even for the employer the advantages of part-time work may help to offset the administrative problems it often imposes.[48]

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[46] Gruenberg and Krech, 1952; p. 214.

[47] Bureau of the Census, 1957 (CPR–P–50, No. 77); Women's Bureau, 1960.

[48] Nye, 1957; Gruenberg and Krech, 1952; Warren, 1955; U.S. Women's Bureau, No. 238–1951; Myrdal and Klein, 1956.

Part-time work, obviously, is a specious solution for women who require more income than they can earn even by full-time work. Here again the theme of change is relevant. The reduction in work hours has already made the working mother's dual job more feasible than it was formerly. It is reasonable to assume that full-time jobs will eventually require fewer hours per day.[49] Perhaps automation will prove a boon to the mothers whose jobs it does not eliminate. We have been threatened occasionally with more leisure than we can well consume, as a result of automation, but this is one threat that is likely to leave the working mother undismayed.

By the community. The community can offer a wide variety of aids. First of all, it can offer the mother a choice as to whether she should work. The Social Security Administration, and the legislation behind its programs, are on record against the mothers of small children being forced by economic necessity to work when such a course is against the welfare of their families. Nothing in this paper conflicts with this basic principle. Moreover the data reported here should be useful in applying the principle—and also in coping with the all too frequent inability to apply it.

Two other ways in which the community can help are too familiar to need more than mention: by maintaining and supervising adequate day-care facilities, and by providing counseling service to help a mother decide whether or not to be a working one. In doing so, it is incumbent upon the community to grapple honestly and realistically with the question whether paid employment is a sound alternative to economic assistance for a mother who cannot earn enough to provide food, shelter, and adequate child-care arrangements. The cost of providing adequate day care—or the ultimate cost of *not* providing it—may exceed the cost of making it possible for her to stay at home with her children.

The community can offer a number of other helps to the working mother, especially in the area of homemaking. It is surprising that, despite a number of enterprising projects, so little has been done by way of neighborhood cooking and housekeeping services, through which women—often older women—by working part time can help the mother who works full time. Komarovsky, for example, contends that the urban household is too small and inefficient, and that economies could be effected by a series of neighborhood businesses,

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[49] The employers' obligation in relation to working conditions and maternity leave is widely recognized and observed. Space limitations preclude direct discussion of this and other aspects of the working mother's physical health.

each specializing in some housekeeping function.[50] Myrdal and Klein recommend larger numbers of "collective houses" in which "such services as cooked meals, laundry, day nurseries, etc., can be obtained at a reasonable price by the families living in them." [51] Others urge the development of well-trained, professional home helpers, suggesting, on the one hand, that we might profit by services developed in some European countries and, on the other hand, that greater professionalization of housekeeping services might help to raise the depressed status of the woman who is "only a housewife." To enhance the status of this woman is another way in which the community might contribute to wiser decisions about whether or not a woman should work.

In summary

To fulfill a rather wide-ranging assignment has required a considerable array of facts and figures. They were reviewed, not so that any specific number or percentage would be remembered, but merely to sketch out the general topography of our subject. There are, however, three points that should have been made convincing enough to stick. First, that almost no generalization holds true for all working mothers or all their children. Second, that many free-floating assumptions about working mothers and their children are untested and some are clearly open to challenge. Finally, that the mother's working, in itself, is only one among many factors impinging on children, and may well be a secondary factor. Primary factors appear to condition its impact on children and family life in three chief ways:

(*a*) The type of arrangements made for the child's care and supervision during the mother's absence. These are partly the result of child-rearing assumptions and behavior, which affect the child whether the mother works or not. Partly they are the result of resources available to her.

(*b*) The way the child perceives and reacts to the mother's absence. This is also a result of basic factors—including his own special needs—which again affect the child in any case.

(*c*) Parental attitudes and behavior (including specific reactions to the mother's outside work). These, once more, are largely the product of basic factors which would affect the child in any case, although in special instances the working mother situation may have a secondary influence on their impact and interaction.

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[50] Komarovsky, 1953; p. 296.

[51] Myrdal and Klein, 1956; p. 172.

All this suggests that the chief opportunities for national and local efforts to maximize benefits and minimize disadvantages for the children and families of working mothers involve improving the resources for child care, reducing the toll taken by the mother's dual job (which in turn affects her family), and strengthening the elements of mental health that condition the well-being of all parents and their children.

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